

ROBERT F. BENNETT
UTAH

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
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GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
JOINT ECONOMIC

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4403
(202) 224-5444

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STATE OFFICES:

- WALLACE BENNETT FEDERAL BUILDING
125 SOUTH STATE, SUITE 4225
SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84138-1188
(801) 524-5933
- JAMES V. HANSEN FEDERAL BUILDING
324 25TH STREET, SUITE 1410
OGDEN, UT 84401-2310
(801) 625-5676
- OLD COURT HOUSE BUILDING
51 SOUTH UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SUITE 310
PROVO, UT 84601-4424
(801) 851-2525
- FEDERAL BUILDING
196 EAST TABERNACLE, SUITE 21
ST. GEORGE, UT 84770-3474
(435) 628-5514
- 77 NORTH MAIN, SUITE 113
P.O. BOX 1326
CEDAR CITY, UT 84721
(435) 865-1335

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240-0002

Dear Secretary Salazar:

I am aware that documents from the Department of the Interior have been assembled in consideration of possible designations of new national monuments, including at least two areas within my home state of Utah. I am shocked and outraged that, given past history with the manner in which the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM) was designated by President Clinton in 1996, this administration would begin taking the same reckless steps.

As you may be aware, when word of the impending GSENM designation began to leak out in 1996, Clinton Administration officials obfuscated and lied, including to me personally, about their intentions. Their correspondence at the time acknowledged that they knew that had elected officials from the state of Utah been made aware earlier, it likely would have resulted in the unraveling of their plans for the monument designation. This was an appalling abuse of executive power and has sown the seeds of significant distrust with your department that continues to this day.

Unfortunately, this administration has already demonstrated a pattern of managing public lands in Utah by executive fiat rather than the established legal processes that allow the public to have a voice in how their lands are managed. The department has already shown a proclivity to set aside public land decisions nearly a decade in the making to pander to a small group of environmental activists who want to keep the public away from the public lands. Instead of an open process that involves local input, the department seems to prefer to make decisions behind closed doors in Washington where there is little accountability and no transparency. This is simply unacceptable and fuels my concerns about these documents and this administration's potential future actions.

There is a right way and a wrong way to consider special designations in the West. I believe that the legislative pattern established in the recently passed bipartisan Washington County Growth and Conservation Act, sponsored by myself and Congressman Matheson, and supported by the entire Utah delegation, the governor, the county commissioners, as well as members of the environmental community and local stakeholders demonstrates the right way to consider special designations. While this pattern took considerable time, effort, and compromise to achieve resolution, its results stand as a victory not only for good public land management, but also the people that actually live and work there. Other delegations in the west, most notably Nevada and Idaho, have also had similar success in assembling locally driven, legislative public land victories. Steps are now being taken to replicate that success in other counties and your department's actions have the potential to grind that progress to a halt.

Lest you think that an executive shortcut would be a great victory for conservation and the West, I can assure you that nothing would do more harm to that cause and to the local communities that have been ready to roll up their sleeves and put together home grown solutions that cannot be achieved through an executive power grab. With all due respect, I doubt that any senator or member of Congress in any of the areas considered in these documents believes that your department is in a better position to ensure local needs are met than they are.

I hope that you will quickly disavow any intention to follow through with these potential designations in Utah. However, if your intent is to proceed down this course, I vow that I will do all in my power to fight an effort to run roughshod over the state of Utah and prevent future abuses of this power.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and "B".

Robert F. Bennett
United States Senator